

ON THE EARLY USE OF THE POINTED ARCH.

At the late meeting of the Archeological Institute of Great Britain,* Mr. Edmund Sharpe read a paper, "On the early use of the Pointed arch," or the period of transition, as he afterwards expressed it, between the first and second great eras of Christian Architecture, for a notice of which we avail ourselves of the columns of the *Athenæum*. Mr. Sharpe confined his observations to a period between 1130 and 1180. Of all the new elements introduced during this transitional period, he observed, the earliest, and certainly the most important in all its bearings and results, was the pointed arch, which, if it did not originate, certainly inspired, and controlled the rest. He would not enter into that fertile field of learning and conjecture, the "Origin of the Pointed Arch," but would restrict what he had to say to the causes which led to its first introduction into Christian architecture, and to its rapid and universal adoption; and these causes he was disposed to look for rather in some real advantage in point of construction than in any supposed superiority in point of decoration. No one who has examined with any attention the architecture of the transitional period could fail to observe the remarkable circumstance that in these buildings, the pointed form of architecture is to be found principally in the vaulting, the pier-arches, and the arches of the crossing; in other words, over the large openings only, whilst in all piercings of the wall, in the doors, the windows, the arcades, and over all the small openings the circular form is preserved unaltered. The pointed arch was not introduced, therefore, for the sake of decoration or effect,—it was introduced for the purposes of construction—and he would, therefore, adopt the happy designation already received of calling the one *Archæ of Construction* and the other *Archæ of Decoration*. The builders of the twelfth century discovered that the pointed arch possessed, in point of construction, certain advantages over the circular arch; they, therefore, introduced it into all those parts of a structure where strength was required; while, from a predilection for the earlier form, they retained the circular arch in all other parts where the safety and stability of the building were not involved. Nothing is more common in the large circular vaulting of the Romanesque style than to find the crown of the transverse arch considerably depressed. This occurs constantly in the long barrel vaultings of the south of France, as well as in the quadripartite vaultings of the north. Depressed circular arches are not uncommon in England, and whether the depression took place immediately after the completion of the work, or at some subsequent period, the depression read this lesson to the builders, that there was a liability in a circular arch of large span to lose its form at the crown. It must have been a matter, moreover, of common observation to every one acquainted with the architecture of the transitional period, that the pointed arch, in its earlier stages, was generally very obtuse in form, and that the variation from the circle is at times so trifling, as scarcely to be perceptible. In the church of Alstadt, in Bavaria, the arch he had found, from actual admeasurement, constructed from one centre only. One discovery led to another, and he was now enabled to assert, from actual admeasurement, that many of the obtusely-pointed arches of the transitional period are not constructed upon the true and acknowledged principles of a pointed arch—that is, from two distinct centres; but are to be considered simply as slight alterations of the semi-circular form. He was of opinion that the pointed arch first made its appearance in the vaulting arches, the arches of the crossing, and the pier arches. He had observed in several churches in the south of France, that whilst all their arches of construction are pointed, all their arches of decoration are circular. But he must be understood to confine his observations to a period between the years 1130 and 1180. An important inquiry yet remained to be made. When did the pointed arch first make its appearance in the arches of construction? Over what length of time did this discrimination in the use of the two forms of arch extend? How long did the pointed arch thus

remain the servant, and the circular arch the master? And at what precise point of time did the pointed arch obtain that ascendancy in the decoration of buildings, which enabled it to accomplish that revolution which its admission in construction had already commenced? There is perhaps no building of the transitional period which better illustrates what he had been advancing than the church of Kirkstall Abbey; it also fortunately happens, that there is perhaps no building to which an authentic date can be more satisfactorily attributed; for we know that the whole of the convent migrated, in the year 1148, from the place of its original establishment to a spot on the banks of the river Aire, where it now stands, and that in the year 1152 the church was already commenced. The building may, therefore, be looked upon as representing the prevailing character of the architecture of the very middle of this transitional period; and it is, therefore, particularly fortunate that the entire church is preserved to us in its original state, the only insertion being that of the east window, and the only addition that of the pinnacles on the gables. He referred to this church as confirmatory of the view he had laid down.

The Marquis of Northampton directed attention to the church of St. Andrew, at Vercelli, in Italy, built by Cardinal Guala, Cardinal Legate in England, during the reign of King John, in which all the exterior arches were rounded, all the interior pointed. This he brought forward in illustration of the theory of Mr. Sharpe.

THE ORIGIN AND USE OF PISCINÆ.

SIR,—With all due respect for the learning displayed by the writer on "The use of the Piscinæ," in your last number, and his description of a "piscina at Haddenham, on the south wall of a chapel which is on the north side of the chancel," I beg to suggest that this so called "piscina" may have been either an aumbry, a hagioscope, or a confessional opening from the chapel to the chancel; and for this plain reason, viz. because he says that it has "no appearance of a basin."

Not, however, to remark on the present vagueness of our terms relative to Gothic architecture, and ecclesiology, permit me to state—as to the difficulty experienced by your correspondent in conceiving how piscinæ "could ever have been suspended,"—that in every Romish church which I have yet examined, there hangs in its sacristy, or near its altar, a vessel containing sanctified water for the ablution of the priest's hands previously to his celebrating mass. This is the *pensile piscina*, spoken of by Ducange, and generally is a copper vessel of three or four quarts capacity, with a rounded bottom and a basket-like handle, by which it is suspended to a peg or hook near to the sacristy door.

I may also observe that, in addition to its several applications mentioned by your correspondent, the word *piscina* is still occasionally applied by the French to denote what we call a font, as in the following extract from an account of the administration of baptism in M. de Caumont's sixth volume of that very useful body of archaeology, his "*Cours d'Antiquités Monumentales*," viz. "*le parrain et la marraine après avoir répondu pour lui, inclinant sa tête sur la piscine; le prêtre prend de l'eau des fonts dans un petit vase et en verse trois fois sur la tête du nouveau né.*" &c. &c.—"the godfather and the godmother after having answered for the child, incline its head over the *piscina*, and the priest then takes, in a small vessel, from the fonts a portion of the water therein contained, which he pours at three times on the infant's head," &c. &c.

But I am trespassing on your useful columns, and will therefore conclude by remarking that, in the application of the terms above pointed out—although there may be some reason for so employing the term *piscina*—it is not easy to say why the term *font* is employed (as it commonly is) in the plural number—unless possibly with allusion to the vessel containing the chrismatory oil which is used in baptism according to the Roman Catholic ritual, and yet used by us Protestants at the coronation of our sovereigns.

W. BROWNE.

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, SOWTON.

THE church of St. Michael, at Sowton, near Exeter, was consecrated on the 12th inst. by the Lord Bishop of the diocese, attended by a large body of clergy and gentry; a part of the cathedral choir assisted in the service.

The neighbourhood is indebted for this edifice to the munificence of Mr. John Garrett, of Bishop's-court, at whose expense the whole has been rebuilt on the site of the old church. The style selected is that which prevailed in the fourteenth century. The plan is, nave with south porch and north aisle; chancel, 29 by 12, with priests' door and vestry, and a tower with entrance at the west end. The material is a stone from the neighbourhood, the mouldings and dressings in Caen stone. The timbers of the roof are open to the interior, and with the ribs and carved bosses have a good effect; there is accommodation for about 200 persons in seats of appropriately carved oak. The reading-desk, &c., are well arranged. The pulpit is of Caen stone, and is to be further enriched by Thomas, the sculptor employed at the new Houses of Parliament, who is also preparing a figure of the patron saint for a niche in the Tower. The windows are all filled with stained glass; the Crucifixion, with the three Marys in the altar window; Moses and Aaron in the side windows of chancel; St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael in the west window. There are four windows with figures and Christian emblems, erected to the memory of deceased members of Mr. Garrett's family. The remaining side windows are filled with ornamented quarries, with labels bearing the Apostles' creed; the whole are by Willement, except that in the west window of aisle, which was removed from the old church, and is the work of Messrs. Ward and Nixon. The chancel is paved with encaustic (or more properly ornamental) tiles of good design. On the south side of the chancel within the rails are two sedilia on steps. The railing is constructed partly of iron bronzed, and partly of brass. Under the east window a string course is carried, supporting two carved panels with the Commandments painted on porcelain. Below the string course the wall is covered with porcelain tiles of a rich pattern. The table is elaborately carved in oak, with panels painted a rich ultramarine colour, a sacred emblem being upon each panel.

The mode of heating by hot air is somewhat novel, and appears to answer well. The belfry is furnished by Messrs. of Whitechapel, with an excellent peal of eight bells. Mr. Hayward, of Exeter, was the architect, and Mr. John Mason, the builder.

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS.—The first meeting in the ensuing session will be held on Monday evening, the 3rd of next month. It depends on the members themselves to provide instructive and agreeable matter, and if each of them would consider it his duty to forward something,—a notice of an ancient building, the resolution of a question in architectural jurisprudence, description of a new material, or of a new mode of construction, the end would be fully attained. A committee was appointed last session to decide on various points of every day practice, and to report thereon. We consider this one of the most important inquiries instituted by the society, and look with interest for the result: extent of an architect's responsibility, the scale of charges, power of recovery, obligation to contractors, &c., are questions of extreme importance, and require to be set at rest.

BUILDING AT COVE.—Messrs. Grissell and Peto, the builders, are said to have purchased of Mrs. Stubbs, of Cove, a spacious extent of building-ground, on which they mean to erect bathing villas, which, it is expected, will have a most material effect in increasing the prosperity of Cove.

BRITISH ARCHEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION.—We hear that the third congress of the association will be held next summer, at Gloucester, under the personal support of the Duke of Beaufort, Earl Fitzhardinge, and Lord Ducie. Lord Albert Conyngham, the president, will preside.

* See pp. 443, 445, 459, and 455, *ante*.